

Session 8 Fasting, Feasting, and God's Zeal (Zech. 7:1-8:23)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Zechariah 7-8 calls us to encounter the zeal of God for His city Jerusalem, His people, and the supremacy and glory of His Son who will be worshiped by all nations (8:20-23; 14:16-18). When we see this as the ultimate purpose and direction of history, it is logical to fully pursue it now.
- B. The whole book of Zechariah is about Jerusalem, including Zechariah 7-8, which beckons us to seek for the fullness of God's destiny for her, instead of living spiritually disconnected from it.
- C. A primary theme in Zechariah 7-8 is ***how to respond*** to the message of grace in Zechariah 1-6. The zeal and mercy of God seen in Zechariah 1-2 reach great heights in Zechariah 3-4 when He freely and fully cleanses Israel's leadership and promises to anoint and give them supernatural resources to lead a national and international revival to remove their enemies (Zech 5-6).
- D. The two chapters of Zechariah 7-8 go together in a special way much like the other two-chapter units (Zech. 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6). Again, Zechariah 7-8 informs Israel how to respond to the grace of God that freely and fully cleanses and anoints them as described in Zechariah 3-4, so that they walk in the fullness of God's promises as set forth in Zechariah 1-2, and in the final removal of all their enemies as seen in Zechariah 5-6. This results in all nations worshiping Jesus (8:20-23).
- E. The Lord gave Zechariah a message about His zeal, burning desire, for His people and purpose. Zechariah was to motivate the people with this revelation of God's heart (8:2), with promises of full restoration if they obeyed (8:3-23) and warnings of judgment (7:12-14) if they refused Him.
- F. He wants us to see His zeal for us and respond with a zeal that loves Him with all our heart (Mt. 22:37). The revelation of His heart and blessings are meant to woo us into wholeheartedness.
- G. Eighteen years earlier, Israel returned from Babylonian captivity to walk in her national promises, specifically related to rebuilding the temple, or house of prayer, which the Lord had designated as a place of worship and encounter with Him. Within two years they became discouraged and quit building the house of prayer for 16 years. After this long delay, the Lord raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to inspire them to commit themselves to God and His purposes with zeal.
- H. Israel repented and recommitted to work on the temple on September 22, 520 BC (Hag. 1:14-15). By November that year they were already drawing back, so Zechariah called them to repent (1:3). They responded quickly (1:6). Then three months later (Feb. 15, 519 BC), Zechariah received eight visions in one night (1:7-6:8). About two years later (Dec. 518 BC), he gave his third message (Zech. 7-8). This was 16 months before the temple was completed (Mar. 516 BC).
- I. They were near the end of the four-year period that it took them to rebuild the temple and establish animal sacrifices and the singers and musicians necessary to keep the temple sanctuary.

II. THE CONTEXT FOR ZECARIAH 7-8

- A. The context for his third message (Zech. 7-8) was the visit of two men from the city of Bethel. They came to Jerusalem with questions about the necessity of fasting. They asked if they had to continue to honor the annual fasts, which had been initiated in response to the tragedies surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity (586 BC). They reasoned that since these fasts were not required in Moses' law and since the Jews were back in Jerusalem in a new season where God's promises were being fulfilled, they should not have to keep fasting.
- B. With the temple nearly finished, and in a new season of blessing, they felt that it was time to stop mourning over what they lacked and just to rejoice in what they had gained. This was one of the primary questions being asked throughout all Israel (7:3). It is the same question that is being asked by many in the Church today.
- C. God's answer came in four messages each indicated by, "*The word of the Lord of Hosts came*" (7:4, 8; 8:1, 18). His complete answer is found in combining all four exhortations (Zech. 7-8).
1. The first two messages are *negative* (Zech. 7), calling them to repent, with warnings.
 2. The last two messages are *positive* (Zech. 8), giving them glorious promises that will cause the fasts to be turned to feasts when Israel is restored and Jesus lives in Jerusalem.
- D. The Lord never answered their question directly, but left them to decide, after giving them His perspective that they only fasted to make their life more comfortable, rather than to encounter Him in deep relationship (7:5). He warned them that their fathers had approached Him that way too (7:7-14), with their focus on receiving circumstantial blessing without growing deep in their relationship with God. In the end they had drawn back in their relationship with God, becoming offended when the blessing didn't come in the way they thought it should. The Lord was asking them if it troubled them that they were asking the wrong question just like their fathers had.
- E. The message was a call to wholeheartedness (7:4-10) in response to God's zeal for them (8:1-2), and commitment to bless them (8:3-23), yet with warnings of judgment for rebellion (7:11-14). This message parallels Zechariah's first message when he called Israel to repentance (1:3), followed by an emphasis on God's zeal and blessing, yet with warnings of judgment (1:4-21).
- F. Zechariah told them that the main point of fasting was to be sorry for their sins as they prayed for God's glory to be released in a greater measure in Jerusalem and, through them, to the nations.
- G. The Lord did not answer their question on fasting directly but answered it by asking a question to highlight the principle that activities like fasting are effective only with a spirit of obedience. Fasting is nothing in itself if the one fasting does not have a genuine desire to know, love, and obey the Lord. Zechariah 7-8 highlights promises for the prayer movement and addresses the need for radical dedication to the Lord. God is restoring the grace for fasting with prayer.

III. ISRAEL’S FOUR NATIONAL FASTS (8:19)

- A. The Jews in exile had instituted four fasts (8:19) to remember four tragic events related to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC (2 Kgs. 25). The only fast that the Law of Moses required was on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29; 23:27-32). The other four annual fasts were voluntary responses because of the tragic situation of the Babylonian captivity. Observant Jews have kept these four fasts since the fifth century BC and especially since the destruction of the temple in 70 AD; most non-Orthodox Jews know about the Ninth of Av.
- B. ***Fast in the fourth month:*** Jerusalem’s walls were breached by Babylon’s army on the ninth day of the fourth month (Tammuz; 2 Kgs. 25:3-4; Jer. 39:2). The fast is remembered on the 17th day.
- C. ***Fast in the fifth month:*** The Temple in Jerusalem was burned (2 Kgs. 25:8-9). The most tragic day for Israel is the day the Temple was destroyed. According to the Talmud, on the very same day, the ninth day of the fifth month of Av (August), Solomon’s temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, and Herod’s temple (Zerubbabel’s) by the Romans in 70 AD.
- D. ***Fast in the seventh month:*** This was to commemorate the assassination of Gedaliah (2 Kgs. 25:25; Jer. 41:2). Nebuchadnezzar made Gedaliah governor of Judah (2 Kgs. 25:22-25). Gedaliah respected and cared for Jeremiah (Jer. 39:11-14; 40:5) just as his father had done. He only reigned for two months, before he was killed by Jewish zealots led by Ishmael.
- E. ***Fast in the tenth month:*** This was to remember the start of the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:1).

IV. QUESTION FROM THE DELEGATION FROM BETHEL (7:1-3)

- A. Men from Bethel come to Jerusalem to ask a question about the necessity of fasting (7:1-3). Four fasts had been instituted related to events (586 BC) that occurred about 70 years earlier.

¹In the fourth year of King Darius [518 BC] it came to pass that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Chislev, ²when the people [from Bethel] sent Sharezer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD, ³and to ask the priests who were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and the prophets, saying, “Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?” (Zech. 7:1-3)

- 1. ***Fourth year:*** This corresponds to December 518 BC; Chislev is a Babylonian name.
- 2. ***People of Bethel sent:*** A delegation from Bethel was sent to Jerusalem to ask a question about fasting. Sharezer and Regem-melech were Babylonian names. This suggests these men were born in Babylon in captivity. Bethel was about ten miles north of Jerusalem.
- 3. Almost all translations include the phrase “***of Bethel***” which is omitted by the KJV and NKJV—The people *of Bethel* had sent... (NIV); The town *of Bethel* had sent... (NAS); The people *of Bethel* had sent... (RSV); and **The people of Bethel had sent** (ESV).

V. THE LORD’S REBUKE (7:4-7)

A. The Lord rebuked the people and did not give them a direct answer to their question (7:4-7)

⁵Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: “When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me? ⁶When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? ⁷Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous?” (Zech. 7:4-7)

1. **Seventy years:** This refers to the seventy years of the Babylonian captivity (606-586 BC).
2. **All the people:** The Lord directed this message to all the people in Israel, not only to the delegation from Bethel; it was one of the primary questions in Israel in that day (7:5).
3. **Did you really fast for Me:** The Lord answers that they had fasted in self-pity because of how difficult things were, not because of their distance from His heart and purpose.
4. The Lord’s response makes it clear that their question was not based on a genuine desire to understand God’s heart and to please Him, but merely to avoid fasting. The Lord asked them who they were fasting for. Were they fasting to see more of God’s glory in their life and nation or only because they wanted their circumstances to improve?
5. An important question being asked today concerns how we are to respond to His grace. Some are asking *how little* do they have to give to God because they have received grace. Others are asking *how much* they can give back to God because they have received grace. This question represents two very different approaches to our relationship with Jesus. In other words, how far do I *have to go* in my relationship with Jesus because of free grace? Or, how far *will He empower me to go* in my relationship with Jesus because of free grace?
6. Does Jesus’ work on the cross *cancel* my need to love and pursue Him with all of my heart, or does it *empower* me to love and pursue Him with all of my heart?
7. A foundational premise of the Christian life is to seek to love God with all our strength. To love God this way means to seek and serve Him with all our strength. We continually seek to give Him more, until we are confident that we love and serve Him with all our strength. God’s grace empowers us to give “all” our strength to Jesus; this is the most reasonable response we can give to His worthiness. (Rev. 5:9-12).
8. A key issue today is the nature of grace and how it works in us and what it produces in us. It includes defining the nature of “the rest” that He gives. He calls us to rest from seeking to earn his love and to cease striving to live with agendas outside His will. By His grace we rest from these two things—we rest from our own works of seeking to earn God’s love and from pursuing fleshly activities in our life that are outside His will.

9. ***Eat and drink:*** In both their fasts and feasts they focused on themselves without regard for their relationship with the Lord or His larger purposes for their nation. Whether in times of fasting with mourning or in feasting with celebration, the same issue is key.
 - a. Their national feasts were to be a time to remember God's goodness with gratitude. Their holy days became merely holidays where they enjoyed food and recreation without taking time to rededicate themselves to God.
 - b. Fasting and feasting are both to be based on the same value of desiring a deeper relationship with God. Fasting was not just about obtaining blessings to make their life easier and feasting was not just getting time off for more recreation. They viewed the feasts as time off from God, instead of it being a day to draw closer to Him.
10. ***Should you not have obeyed:*** They should have obeyed the words of the prophets that were given to Jerusalem in times of prosperity. Their forefathers did not understand that the season of prosperity had been given to them to motivate them into wholeheartedness. They were perpetuating the same error for which the prophets corrected their forefathers.

VI. THE COMMAND TO REPENT (7:8-14)

- A. Zechariah summarized the message of the prophets, calling for justice, mercy, and compassion, and for Israel to never oppress the weak nor make plans to do evil. We express our love to God by loving people. The Lord calls for fasting that is rooted in obedience and results in loving people. He describes the life that agrees with seeking God in fasting and prayer for breakthrough.
⁹Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. ¹⁰Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless...let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.
(Zech. 7:9-10)
- B. Their forefathers neglected to obey and it resulted in God's judgment (7:11-14). Since they refused to listen when the Lord called, so He refused to listen when they called (Jer. 11:11).
¹¹"They refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear...¹³They would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts. ¹⁴"But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations...Thus the land became desolate after them...for they made the pleasant land desolate." (Zech. 7:11-14)
 1. ***The Lord scattered them:*** God released His judgment on the people by scattering them among all the nations.
 2. ***The land became desolate:*** God released His judgment on the land, making it desolate.
- C. God judged them by refusing to answer their prayer as the crisis increased. It started with the Babylonian siege and escalated to the capture of Jerusalem. For twenty years the Babylonian oppression steadily increased, eventually resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem.

VII. THE FULLNESS OF BLESSING COMING TO JERUSALEM (8:1-17)

- A. Zechariah continues the message that was started in Zechariah 7. In Zechariah 8, the Lord set before Israel their future destiny and restoration in the millennial kingdom. The restoration in Zechariah's day was a foreshadowing of a future greater blessing to come to Israel.
- B. The message of Zechariah 7 was to repent, seek God, and live godly *to avoid judgment*. The message of Zechariah 8 was to repent, seek God, and live godly *to receive future blessing*.
- C. In Zechariah 8 we see two main messages with ten distinct themes, each introduced by "Thus says the Lord" (8:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 19, 20, 23).
- D. God's promises for Israel and all His people are rooted in revelation of His zeal (8:2). This is one of the most powerful self-revelations of God in Scripture. The revelation of His zeal relates here to restoring the grace of fasting with prayer for the full blessing on Israel. When we see God's emotions, it motivates us to pray with fasting for the fullness of His purpose.

²I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her. (Zech. 8:2)

- 1. Zechariah had been commissioned with a specific message to proclaim about God's zeal (1:14). Now, two years later, he repeats it for emphasis in Zechariah 8:2.
¹⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I am zealous for Jerusalem..." (Zech. 1:14)
- 2. Jesus has zeal for Jerusalem. Thus, we engage our hearts with His purpose for this city. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because of her rebellion against God (Mt. 23:37) In Ezekiel's day, God spared the intercessors who mourned over Jerusalem's sin (Ezek. 9:4-6). The Lord promises to prosper any who will love and pray for Jerusalem.
⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you..." (Ps. 122:6)
- 3. God promises to bless the godly by comforting and restoring Jerusalem. He exhorts the Gentiles to rejoice with Jerusalem and not be disengaged, critical, or envious (Isa. 66:10). Rejoicing or engaging with her is essential to participating with her blessings (Isa. 66:11).
¹⁰Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her; ¹¹that you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom... be delighted with...her glory. (Isa. 66:10-11)
- 4. The revelation of God's zeal was Zechariah's core message. God's burning desire is for His people and purpose. It is manifest in Jesus as an affectionate Bridegroom, powerful King, and righteous Judge who intervenes to remove everything that hinders love.
- 5. The message of God's zeal is given to awaken our zeal for God. Jesus told the church of Laodicea that they must repent and be zealous because He loved them. He pointed back to Zechariah 8:2, linking His love, zeal, and repentance just as Zechariah preached it.

¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:19)

- E. The Lord will live in Jerusalem (8:3) just as Zechariah prophesied earlier (1:16; 2:10). Jesus referred to Jerusalem as the city of the great King (Mt. 5:35). The nations will call Jerusalem the City of Truth, and the temple mount will be called the Holy Mountain. Jesus' throne will be there, making Jerusalem the epicenter of God's activity throughout the millennial earth (Isa. 2:2-4).
³"I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain." (Zech. 8:3)
- F. Jerusalem will be a city that is perfectly safe without any fear, crime, or war (8:4-5). Elderly people will sit in the streets, and children will play in them without fear. Isaiah described people living to a great age, even for hundreds of years, being as "old as a tree" (Isa. 65:20, 25).
⁴"Old men and old women shall sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with his staff in his hand because of great age. ⁵The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets." (Zech. 8:4-5)
- G. These blessings seemed too good to be true to the people of Zechariah's day (8:6). This is a parenthetical statement describing how the people found it hard to believe Zechariah's words.
⁶"If it is marvelous [too good to be true] in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous in My eyes?" says the LORD of hosts. (Zech. 8:6)
- H. The Lord promised to bring His people back to Jerusalem (8:7-8). This will be a total reversal of the scattering that Israel has suffered. Israel's national conversion will result in the people enjoying covenant relationship with Him as His people. The Jewish exiles coming home from Babylon and Assyria returned mostly from the east or north. It was only after Israel's dispersion by the Romans in 70 AD that they returned from the west. This greatly accelerated in 1948.
⁷"Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; ⁸I will bring them back, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness." (Zech. 8:7-8)
- I. The promises in Zechariah 8:1-8 gave them motivation for wholehearted obedience (8:9-10). The phrase "these days" (8:9, 15) "this people" (8:11b, 12e) refers to the people in Zechariah's generation who were asking the question about fasting.
⁹Let your hands be strong, you who have been hearing in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, who spoke in the day the foundation was laid for the house of the LORD of hosts, that the temple might be built. ¹⁰For before these days there were no wages for man nor any hire for beast; there was no peace from the enemy for whoever went out or came in; for I set all men, everyone, against his neighbor. (Zech. 8:9-10)
1. **Be strong**: The prophets Haggai and Zechariah called them to be strong so as to finish building the temple (Hag. 2:4). Zechariah told them three times to be strong (8:9, 13, 15).

2. ***The foundation was laid:*** Israel laid the foundation twice, 18 years apart. The first time was in 536 BC (Ezra 3:8-10). But hindrances came and they quit working on the temple for 16 years. This verse (8:8) refers to the second time the foundation was laid in 518 BC.
 3. ***No wages:*** During the 16-year delay, the Lord sent an economic crisis with a drought (Hag. 1:6-11; 2:15-19). He told them to compare their economic condition before they began working on the temple to their present condition. They were in a new season in which the Lord promised “from this day will I bless you” (Hag. 2:18-19).
6“You have sown much, and bring in little...and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes...⁹You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away...because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house...¹¹I called for a drought on the land.” (Hag. 1:6-11)
 4. ***No peace:*** There was no peace from the enemy, including foreigners (Ezra 4:1-5) and fellow Jews (their neighbors). There was civil strife as men stood against their neighbors.
- J. God promised to bless the economy and agriculture and stop the drought (8:11-12; Hag. 2:19). Zechariah both rebuked (7:5) and encouraged (8:9-12, 14) the people in his own generation.
¹¹“But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days...¹²For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew—I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these.” (Zech. 8:11-12)
- K. God will save Israel and Judah and cause them to be a blessing to the nations (8:13, 7; Gen. 12:3). There will be a worldwide reversal of the curse in the Millennium.
¹³“It shall come to pass that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing.” (Zech. 8:13)
- L. God's zeal is seen in His determination to both do good to and discipline Israel (8:14-15). It is important to see both expressions of His zeal in order to understand His end-time plans for Israel.
¹⁴“Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I would not relent, ¹⁵so again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.” (Zech. 8:14-15)
- M. Zechariah emphasized both sides to Israel receiving God's blessing in his generation (8:14-17)—God's role in determining to do good “in these days” (8:14-15) and Israel's in obeying (8:16-17). In light of God's great promises, the people should speak with truth, do justice, and bring peace in their community life. This is a repetition of the exhortation to godliness given in 7:9-10.
¹⁶“These are the things you shall do: speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; ¹⁷Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; do not love a false oath. All these are things I hate.” (Zech. 8:16-17)

- N. He described the lifestyle that agrees with seeking God with fasting and prayer for breakthrough. We are to use our resources as an expression of our loyalty and love for God and His purpose. We express our love to God by loving people. The Lord calls for fasting that is rooted in obedience that results in our loving people.

VIII. JESUS WILL BE EXALTED IN THE NATIONS FROM JERUSALEM (8:18-23)

- A. The Lord only gave a partial answer to the question about fasting (7:5). He now returns to this question, thus showing that this was the subject that He was addressing throughout Zechariah 7-8. The fast days of the past will be feasts in the future, as Israel experiences the fullness of salvation.
- 19The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be...cheerful feasts for the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace. (Zech. 8:19)***
- B. **Therefore love truth and peace:** Truth and peace will so fully triumph; Our fasting should focus on these and not just on enriching our personal circumstances (7:5).
- C. God's zeal is for the supremacy and glory of His Son, who will be worshiped by all the nations from Jerusalem (2:11; 8:20-23; 14:16-18). This will be a result of Jesus living Jerusalem (8:3).
- 20"Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; 21the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also.' 22Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD." (Zech. 8:20-22)***
- D. All will come to Jerusalem to worship Him (14:16-18). This is what God ultimately desires—the supremacy of Jesus and all nations loving Him with the zeal with which He loves them. This is His big-picture purpose that will be accomplished in history; it makes sense for us to do it now.
- 16Everyone who is left of all the nations...shall go up from year to year to worship the King... 17Whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. (Zech. 14:16-17)***
- E. People from all nations will come to Jerusalem to worship Jesus and see His glory (Isa. 66:18).
- 18"I will gather all nations [Gentiles] and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory... 19I will send to the nations...who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. 20Then they [Gentiles] shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the LORD out of all nations...to My holy mountain Jerusalem. (Isa. 66:18-20)***
- F. Jerusalem will be the epicenter of blessing in millennial kingdom.

²All nations shall flow to it [Jerusalem]. ³Many people shall...say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He [Jesus] will teach us...for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." (Isa. 2:2-3)

- G. Many Gentiles will grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, not to persecute them, but to ask to accompany them because God's blessing so obviously rests on him. Jesus' glory will be so apparent in Jerusalem that all the nations will go to Him

²³"In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" (Zech. 8:23)